

March 29, 1956

The Role of Intelligence in Policy Formulation

The National Security Act of 1947 set up an integrated intelligence structure in the United States Government, as part of a general reorganization of the American Defense structure accomplished by that act. The sections of the act pertaining to intelligence were designed to incorporate the lessons of World War II and avoid the gaps and duplications in intelligence which occurred with a system of competing intelligence agencies. It was an attempt to coordinate the activities and improve the results of the several intelligence gathering and producing arms of the US Government by establishing a central authority through which all national intelligence is channeled.

The National Security Council, (NSC), the top Presidential advisory body in the US Government, was established under that act, and it is this body which is the ultimate recipient of the most refined intelligence, the National Intelligence Estimates, which aid the NSC and the President in policy making. The NSC is composed of the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of Defense Mobilization. Additional regular attenders at its meetings are the Secretary of the Treasury, Director of the Budget, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Director of Central Intelligence.

One of the principal results desired by the Congress when it established a central intelligence system under the National Security Act was a means whereby reliable estimates based on intelligence could be provided for use by those formulating national policy. For this purpose, the Act specified as one of the duties of "the Central Intelligence Agency", for the purpose of coordinating the intelligence activities of the several Governmental departments and agencies in the interest of national security, "to correlate and evaluate intelligence related to the national security." In order that this correlation and evaluation might be based on complete information, the Act specified (within certain limitations) that all intelligence in the possession of any department of the government should be made available to the Director of Central Intelligence, and that all such intelligence would all be open to his inspection.

Since the purpose of the Agency in correlating and evaluating intelligence was "coordinating the intelligence activities of the several Governmental departments and agencies" it was evident that "national security" intelligence was not to be the product of CIA alone. Realizing that differences of opinion and interpretation might occur, the NSC recognized the right of any party to an intelligence estimate "relating to the national security" to bring a variant opinion or interpretation to NSC's attention--to "dissent" in other words.

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Date 3/31/92

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In the nine years since the passage of the National Security Act, coordinated intelligence is rendered to the NSC in accordance with these various provisions. This method might be said to involve two steps: preparation and review.

The Central Intelligence Agency prepares national intelligence estimates, not by itself, but in conjunction with other intelligence agencies or even non-intelligence agencies of the government whose special knowledge or ability may be appropriate. The preparation of these consolidated papers based on intelligence and aimed at problems of policy, which are known as "National Intelligence Estimates", is in the hands of a single agency which can furnish necessary guidance in the assembly and synthesis of material, but will not do so without reference to other agencies.

Once CIA has prepared a jointly considered draft, it is submitted to the scrutiny of the heads of the agencies that aided in its preparation meeting under the chairmanship of the Director of Central Intelligence. The formal organization provided for this purpose is known as the Intelligence Advisory Committee and consists of the Special Assistant for Intelligence to the Secretary of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, of the Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, Air Force; the Chairman of the Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Intelligence and Security Division; the Director of Intelligence of the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Other officers may be included in IAC deliberations when the Committee so desires.

The Director of Central Intelligence is chairman of the IAC. He has an interest in each estimate it discusses, as opposed to other members whose professional interest may be marginal with reference to some estimates. It is not the purpose of the IAC to arrive at a unanimous opinion on any estimate it considers, nor is it the Committee's purpose to make sure that the NSC will have the benefit of all shades of opinion in the form of individual "dissents." The responsibility of the IAC--in broadest terms--is to determine that conclusions reached in each estimate are correct and that available evidence is sufficient to support these conclusions.

It is felt that this system is an excellent one for several reasons. In the IAC there sit the top intelligence officers of the top intelligence agencies. They are well qualified to discuss and pass on the product of the best each agency, with its peculiar responsibilities, has been able to develop. In maintaining the integrity of the formerly quasi-autonomous intelligence agencies of the government there has been kept the background of experience and know-how in the speciality of each agency; while in placing

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them under a central authority, duplication, costly expansion, and competition has largely been eliminated. For instance, Army no longer produces political intelligence and State no longer military. Thus also avoided is the danger of false confirmation.

In CIA, the intelligence community has its backbone. This is the one agency whose sole business is intelligence. Like other agencies, it operates in fields to which its nature is best suited, but unlike other agencies it provides a clearing house and support for the activities of the other agencies.

*Typed for DCI through
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